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FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND INR SMOFFATT

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: ANOTHER ROYG INSIDER SPEAKS OUT: "HE WON'T LISTEN
TO ANYONE"

REF: SANAA 1486

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. Presidential first cousin and well-connected ruling General People's Congress Member of Parliament Mohammed al-Qadhi has joined other prominent former insiders) including Tariq al-Fadhli, Mohammed Salim Basenduah and Hamid al-Ahmar) in blaming President Ali Abdullah Saleh for Yemen's myriad problems, and expressing doubt that the current regime will ever change its wrong-headed policies. Qadhi claimed that strengthening Parliament to serve as a check on the power of the executive was the last remaining hope to salvage Saleh's government. Along with the ongoing war in Sa'ada, the growing threat from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen's failing economy, the very public loss of influential allies like Qadhi will open President Saleh up to further challenges to his rule. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S) Ruling General People's Congress (GPC) MP, Deputy Head of Parliament's Oil and Development Committee and presidential first cousin Mohammed al-Qadhi joined Islah MP and powerful tribal sheikh Hamid al-Ahmar (reftel) in openly criticizing the President and holding him directly responsible for the country's woes in press interviews. On August 17, the Yemeni Socialist Party's al-Ishtiraki web site carried public statements by Qadhi accusing the President of interfering with Parliamentary affairs and blaming him for the war in Sa'ada and the ongoing restiveness in southern Yemen. Qadhi, like Ahmar, is among a very small number of well-connected members of the political elite in Yemen who enjoy the influence and position to speak more openly than the rest of the population about President Saleh and his family members.

CIRQUE DE SALEH

¶3. (S) In an August 23 meeting with PolOff, Qadhi echoed the concerns of many of Saleh's former confidants and advisors when he described how the President has, over the last 15 years, increasingly shut them out and begun relying solely on himself or his closest family members in his decision-making. "Since 1994, he decided that he was the only man capable of making decisions in this country," Qadhi said. He added that his father, Abdulillah al-Qadhi, the President's uncle and among the generals from Sanhan village who installed Saleh as president in 1978, had a falling out with the President over his handling of the 1994 war, although Qadhi himself remained in close contact with Saleh until recently. "I have tried to tell him that Yemen has serious problems, but he gets angry and shuts me out. He and I fight often about his sons. He doesn't listen to anyone." Qadhi said that Saleh's close-mindedness was reflected even in their home village of Sanhan, where "five or six people are well-off, and there are thousands with nothing."

NO HOPE FOR CHANGE

¶4. (S) According to Qadhi, the President will never leave office as long as he has a firm grasp on the military and security services, which are stacked with men from Sanhan. Although the President is bothered by the fact that he has lost popularity among the general population in recent years, it does not really threaten his grip on power, Qadhi said.

As to the succession question, Qadhi was unable to name a likely or "acceptable" replacement for Saleh. On Hamid al-Ahmar, he said, "The President has conducted a campaign against him for 10 years, and at this point, most people think he's worse than the President." Qadhi acknowledged, however, that Ahmar possesses the two things a Yemeni president must have to be successful) money, first, and then political power. Qadhi dismissed members of the Taiz-based Hayel Saeed family, despite their extensive wealth and connections, because "they have no political skills."

¶5. (S) Qadhi named GPC MP Hussein al-Ahmar (Hamid's brother) and Mohammed Abulahoum, a member of the GPC's General Council and a leader of the Bakil tribal confederation, as two of the strongest reform-minded individuals within the GPC hierarchy. Qadhi hopes to use the Solidarity Council, a political action group he founded in early 2009 with Hussein al-Ahmar, as a tool for compelling the regime to implement badly needed reforms. "It's not that powerful yet, but we're working to build our strength and become a political party," he said. The Council will conduct "massive citizen education campaigns" to inform Yemenis about their rights in a democratic system, with the goal of mobilizing the populace to agitate for change through public demonstrations. "We will start first in Sana'a, and then it can't be ignored," he said. "The people of the south will then know that they are not alone, that people are suffering all over Yemen. The people in the north are with them, and they will be convinced to stay with this new unity." Qadhi hinted that if peaceful demonstrations were unsuccessful in achieving dramatic change, "we will use other means."

THE PROBLEM WITH PARLIAMENT

¶6. (S) "The crux of the problem in Yemen is that the Parliament, judicial system and all of the ministries report directly to the President," Qadhi told PolOff. He argued that Parliament is totally subjugated by the regime, with its speaker Yahya al-Raie taking orders directly from President Ali Abdullah Saleh regarding the topic and tone of Parliamentary sessions, sometimes only minutes before a session is about to start. One-third of MPs are uneducated and unaware of their duties as Parliamentarians and one-third of MPs are co-opted by the regime and afraid to challenge the President lest they lose their privileges, according to Qadhi. The fewer than 100 remaining MPs are comprised of weak opposition party members and a group of reform-minded GPC members. He said that strengthening Parliament as a check on the power of the executive was "the only hope to save this regime." After Ramadan, Qadhi said, he and other reformers in Parliament would push to replace the current leadership) Raie and his three deputies) and replace them with independent MPs willing to challenge the President. (Note: Ramadan will end in late September. End Note.)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

¶7. (S) Mohammed al-Qadhi is a ruling General People's Congress (GPC) Member of Parliament from Sana'a (Hasabah district), the Deputy Chair of the powerful Oil and Development Committee, and a member of the GPC's highest body) the General Council. He and President Saleh are first cousins, both from the small village of Sanhan. Qadhi's father, Abdulillah al-Qadhi, was among the generals who installed Saleh as president of Yemen in 1978. Qadhi helped found the powerful Islah Charitable Association in the 1990s. He earned a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Public Administration from the U.S. in 1993, and lived in the U.S. for seven years in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Qadhi is the father of five children. He speaks fluent Arabic and English.

COMMENT

¶8. (S) Qadhi is the latest of several high-profile political insiders to speak out openly against the President, a red-line topic in Yemen less than one year ago. Unlike the others, Qadhi is the first close family member and Sanhani to turn on President Saleh. Whether or not Qadhi and other influential insiders) including Tariq al-Fadhli, Mohammed Salim Basenduah and Hamid al-Ahmar) are truly concerned about the fate of Yemen, or, smelling blood in the water, are

positioning themselves for a post-Saleh era, their open criticism and "Saleh must go" attitude are a considerable departure from the political norm. The public loss of former friends and allies, coupled with Saleh's failures in resolving conflict in Sa'ada, defeating al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and turning around Yemen's struggling economy, are likely to encourage a pile-on effect that will open him up to further challenges to his rule. END COMMENT.
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